

# 'My Story'

## Gerry Leeper

### Shortened interview transcripts from the Unheard Voices Project

**M**y name is Gerry Leeper. I was born in Glasgow in 1937.

#### Becoming Deafened

I was sitting in our house with my youngest boy, he was 3 at the time, and I got up to walk across the room and I adjusted the television set and the next thing I knew I was lying on the floor and the room was spinning round and I was really very, very ill and sick. I was able to speak to my son and he actually ran across the road and got a neighbour.

I was in hospital for a week and they didn't know what had occurred but after three months of going back and forward to the GP I was sent to hospital outside Glasgow. They put me on a big table and put water in my ears and I was very ill and they surmised from that I had Ménière's disease.

With Ménière's you get things which I know now are called 'drops' where you can be walking along and you just suddenly drop and you're dizzy and lying on the ground and you do not know how you got there. Several times when I lived in Edinburgh I ended up in people's gardens lying down and I know I did that because I felt it coming and just threw myself away from the pavement in to the garden rather than the road. The other aspect of Ménière's is that people avoid you because acting dizzy is the same as looking drunk and I have had occasions when I've really wanted help and people have just walked past me thinking I've been drunk.

What happens with Ménière's it seems to be that you have an attack and lose a bit of hearing. So you lose your hearing gradually over a period of time.

#### Employment

When I was first diagnosed I was still working but I was having to come home when I wasn't well without my bosses knowing, through the back door as it were, because I was scared I'd lose my job and it went on for a couple of years.

I was actually in a very senior job with a large company. I was responsible for 3,000 people through three sub-managers and various departments and I had a secretary and I was getting paid quite well and having got to that sort of position I didn't want to lose what I was earning and the responsibility and everything that came with it. I suppose fear of that and suddenly becoming possibly unemployed would be the reason I tried to hide it.

Gradually I was getting better, the medication was clicking in but I was still having quite bad attacks, my employers found out and I had to accept a demotion to a lesser job.

I was extremely upset of course because it was a reduction in money and a much lesser job. I think they respected my health problem and put me in to a position where I would, probably, leave at my own speed which was, I suppose, very considerate of them.

#### Family

I have to say my wife Alison was exceptionally good about it. She accepted the fact that I was going to go to lipreading classes to try to help me and we also went to signing classes together for two years and although we do not sign now we do on occasions sign if we're in a restaurant or a busy place.

#### Cochlear Implant

I received a cochlear implant in 2004, so that's 5 years ago. When you have the operation and you wake up with the

large turban on your head it is quite frightening and of course you've got the stitches down the side of the back of your ear so I went back after a week and I got the stitches out and then after another five weeks I went back to get what they call 'switch on' and that was probably one of the most dramatic things that ever happened to me. I can remember they put you through a test first of all where you hear all these little beeps and they test all the electrodes to see if they are working.

Then the operator without any warning at all said, 'can you hear me Gerry?' And I just started crying I couldn't believe it and it was like somebody had turned the clock back and it was so remarkable. Then Alison spoke and I heard her voice and it was all just quite remarkable.

There are some situations where the cochlear implant just doesn't work. 90 per cent of situations I'm happy with. If you're in a large crowd and there is a background noise you have to be very careful how you situate yourself to make the best advantage of hearing a one to one conversation or in a group for that matter. I'm not frightened now of being in a group.

My granddaughter was asked what she remembered most about my implant and she said it was wonderful to be able to tell me a joke on the telephone and hear me laugh.

